

# Unfinishing spaces

A theatre for the curious

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## 1.1

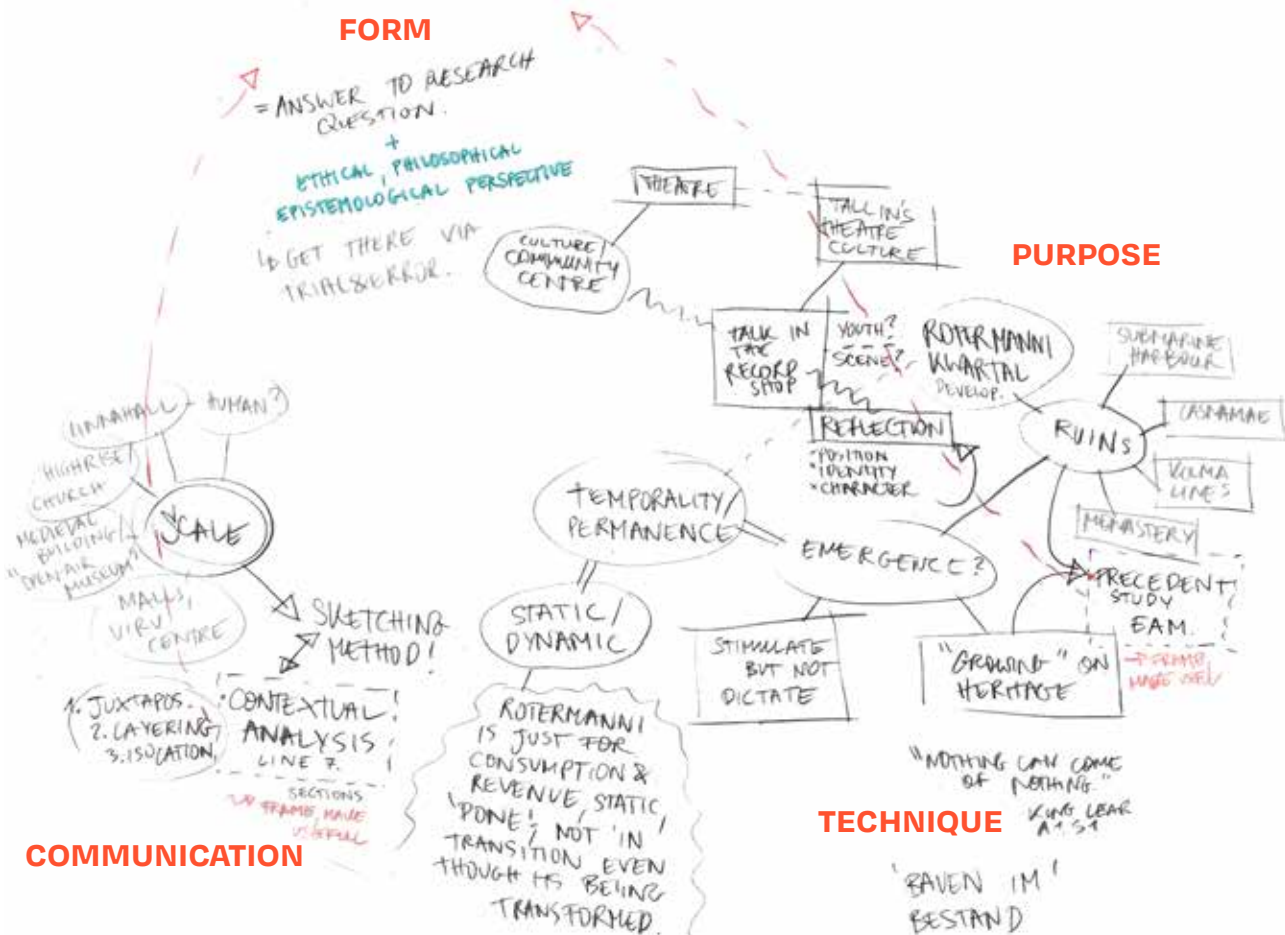
# Research Introduction

During my initial exploration, I felt somewhat lost as I couldn't decide for a *most relevant theme* in the first four weeks. The group work focusing on Line 7 and the excursion to Tallinn brought clarity.

My ambitions for the Master's graduation project were shaped through reflection on my identity and background, which I had ample time for, due to a missed flight to Tallinn. Reviewing past projects, I identified enjoyable and valuable experiences, realising there is not necessarily an overarching theme, but that any project can be done excellently.

## ↓ Mind Map

For a tutoring session with Klaske I prepared a mindmap to jot down my thoughts after the first day.





### ← Scale

Using examination of scale as our tool informed my group about the specifics of Tallinn.

### In Tallinn

We found that some of our Line 7 findings were contradicted by new developments not yet on Google Maps due to their recent nature. Nevertheless, our key findings remained consistent. Using the comparative examination of scale as our tool had told us a lot about the specifics of Tallinn: Extreme juxtapositions of architectures, such

as mighty skyscrapers next to dwarfed orthodox churches, layering of historical and modern buildings, and isolation of pure archetypes. The newly developed Rotermann District, situated between Tallinn Old Town, the Port of Tallinn, and Viru Square turned out to be the most intriguing in terms of socio-spacial and typological patterns. It has been transformed from a 19th-century industrial

area into a confident self-characterizing zone, with modern additions to heritage buildings and designed to function as a hybrid urban complex. The architecture surprised me with its quality, surpassing the expectations set by online research, offering diverse textures, shapes, and engaging urban plazas. Yet, upon closer examination and daily visits, I noticed certain issues, particularly at the fringes of the district.

# 1.2

## Problematising Disconnection

### Rotermann District

**The *Rotermanni Kwartal* is disconnected from the adjoining parts of the city. Despite its surroundings being under constant construction, it is an area of finished, static state, characterised by luxury brand shops, offices, squeaky-clean co-working spaces, expensive housing and prescribed consumption spaces. Interrupted pathfinding, nonextension of the axes and connective arms to the adjoining areas and the seafront are the result of the lack of a cohesive urban vision.**

#### Rigid programming

The first reason for the evident disconnection might be the district's development being dictated by investors whose primary aim is revenue and who want to distance themselves from any responsibility that might occur after their project is "finished". Transformations and transitions are processes that make the development of an investment hard to calculate. Conversely, appropriation as a process



#### ↓ Extent of programming

How much a space is programmed correlates with the effect it has on the humans that interact with it.

**too dictated**

**just right**

**too loose**

boring

stimulating

overwhelming

is hardly plannable but it can be enabled by functional programming and the morphological specifics of urban planning and architecture. The rigid programming and "closed" architecture of the Rotermanni Kwartal grants the control needed to hinder such unforeseeable uses, but the result is an overly prescribed, dictated space that, despite its rather interesting form, seems static, boring and clashing with the rest of the dynamic, unfinished city.



### Spatial disconnection

The District finds itself with excellent external infrastructure by a formidable transport node. Yet approaching this node is an adventure in itself, possibly involving a journey through a partly ruined wall and a sense of trepidation due to "No Trespassing" signs.

The Viru Centre faces the south facades of the

Rotermanni Kwartal and its hotel tower watches over the district. In the north the Estonian Museum of Architecture is flanked by two-lane roads either side, merging to the main four lane artery into the City. In the west, the greenbelt surrounding the old town has parklike quality. The highrises in the southeast seem to stand as an antipode to the form of the old town.

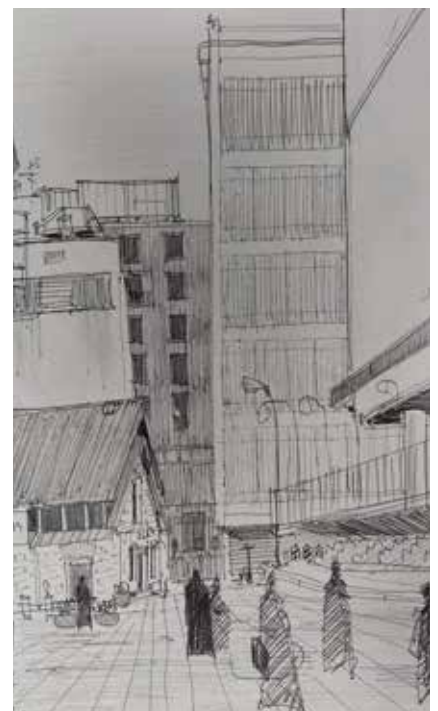


### ← **Frayed Fringes**

Situated between the heart of the Rotermann District and a prominent transportation node and marketplace of the Old Town, one can find dilapidated structures in immediate proximity to the flashy, modernized “carpenter’s workshop”, a great example of architecture during the economic boom, when private clients had the desire and courage to commission more extravagant architecture.

### **Juxtaposition** →

Recently restored heritage buildings, augmented by contemporary extensions, contrast the imposing presence of the early 2000s “Coca Cola Plaza,” a sprawling complex comprising a casino and a movie theatre.





### **Boxed in**

During my exploration of the area, the surrounding building sites clearly cut off the area; close to the viru centre, the area towards the harbour with the Estonian Museum of Architecture and the new developments on the perimeter of the Rotermanni district itself were clear obstructions of passage, albeit temporary. But even with the building sites gone, the district feels like an enclave, its polished appearance and static programming clashing against the unfinished city that Tallinn extrovertly presents itself to be.

### **Blocked seafront**

In Tallinn, a pressing issue has long been the city's inability to connect effectively with its seafront. New buildings erected in recent years have inadvertently closed off crucial axis to the sea, further complicating matters. Even the areas along the seaside, previously restricted, have seen development devoid of a functional street network, resembling isolated suburban enclaves more than a cohesive part of the city. Tallinn's expansion should seamlessly extend to the sea, with priority given

to developing corridors perpendicular to the coastline while respecting the existing city's layout.

### **Lack of vision**

This disconnection evident at all fringes of the Rotermanni District. It is exacerbated by the privatization of state-owned land, often lacking a solid baseplan and appropriate regulations. The result is a disjointed urban landscape, where private interests take precedence over a cohesive, citywide vision. The heart of the problem lies in the failure to integrate the development of buildings and street spaces. To improve the integration of the Rotermanni District, fostering a more cohesive urban fabric, it is essential to shift from only rigid, static programming towards flexible programming that encourage adaptive and community-oriented uses.

**The disconnection of the Rotermanni District is due to three key issues:**

- 1. inadequate programming for dynamic local engagement**
- 2. interruptions in spatial flow toward the seafront and other city areas**
- 3. failure to harmoniously integrate building and street space development.**

**From this problem statement I derive my research question:**

**“How can the disconnection of the Rotermanni District be effectively addressed and rectified, considering the need for dynamic local engagement, uninterrupted spatial flow to the seafront and other city areas, and the integration of building and street space development?”**

# 1.3

## Theoretical and Historical Framework

In the previous section I have outlined the central question I have set out to confront. In this section I will will enumerate the essential literary works that will form the theoretical and historical framework within which I will position myself. I will also introduce supplementary subquestions associated with this framework.

### Historical framework

The historical framework will provide a structured and organized approach to understanding and interpreting historical developments of the Rotermann District, allowing for a systematic and rigorous examination of past phenomena.

### Specific Typology/ Morphology

- City Unfinished: Urban Planning Visions and Spatial Scenarios of Tallinn. EKA
- Estonian Architectural Review MAJA spring 2022 (108) "Opening Tallinn to the sea"

### Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework serves as the intellectual underpinning, offering a set of concepts, theories, and ideas that guide the analysis and interpretation of the historical context, providing a broader perspective for understanding the subject matter at hand.

- DETAIL magazine 1/2.2023 Building in Existing Contexts

### Praxeology

- Consumption Space Or Public Space? in Ehituskunst #61/62 Small Towns: Non-Growing. Kristjan Peik
- Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in The Postmodern Metropolis
- Building Cities. Richard Sennett
- **What effect do new consumption-focused city developments have on its communities?**

### Ecology

- Reyner Banham and the Paradoxes of High Tech. Todd Gannon
- **How does hightech relate to the heritage building transformations in Tallinn?**

### Subsequent utility

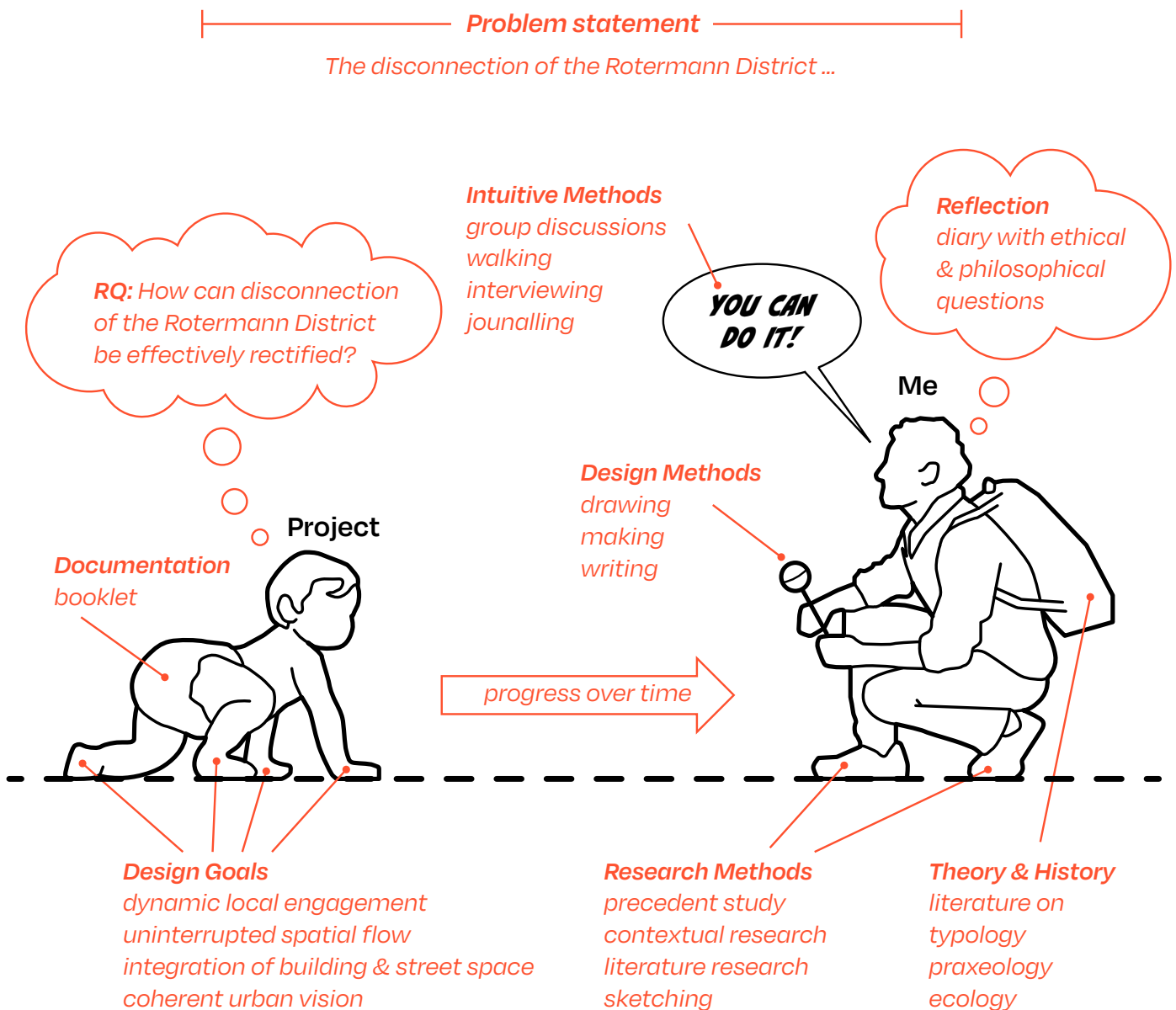
Ultimately this framework will not only inform the research of site and theme of interest, but will serve as the base for design decisions later on in the process.

## 1.4

## Methodology

## learning to walk

- ↓ A research question challenged by a problem statement embedded into a broader historical and theoretical perspective is confronted by **the project** which is progressed by intuitive, design and research methods and is documented.



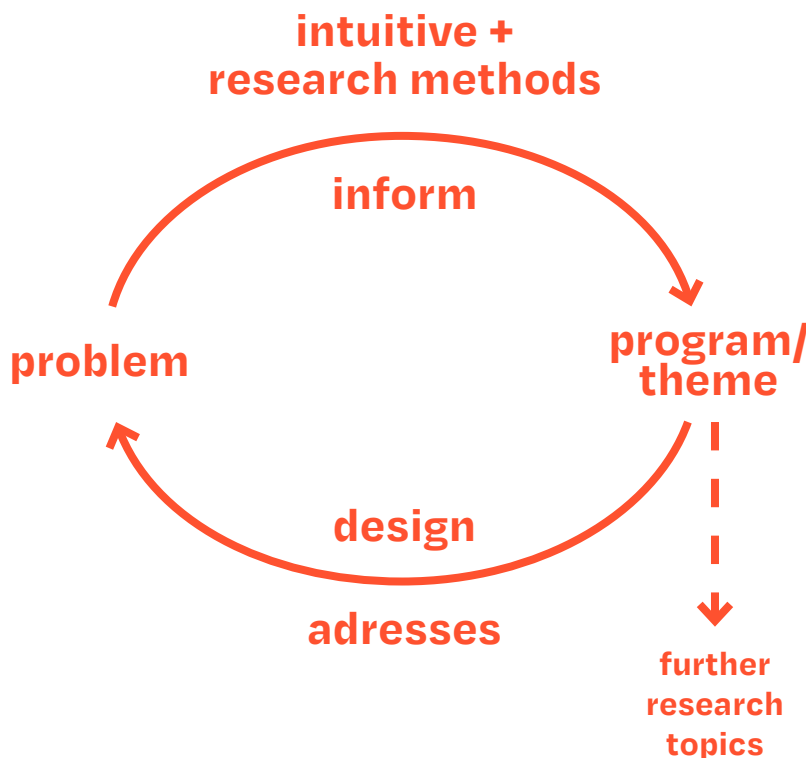
## 1.5

# Intuitive Methods

## Engaging a local

All the primary mode of exploration requires is curiosity. Walking the city, visiting landmarks, museums, galleries and events and engaging with locals are fueled by this curiosity.

In combination with interpretation and documentation techniques such as sketching, photographing, jounalling, interviewing, a piecemeal understanding of the city can be crafted, which in turn helps me to uncover deficiencies that can inform the programming of my project.



### Finding inspiration

What Tallinn needs cannot be deduced from a single interview. However, talking with locals can be an inspiration for further lines of research and helps gain access to information that cannot be accessed in other types of research. For this reason, on the second day, I made my way through the kalamaja district to find what they call “the scene”.

### Plaadipood record store

After a few duds, I luckily stumbled across an inconspicuous building from which much promising music sounded. The signs in front promised a fashion label, a second hand vintage store and a record shop. Inside, I also found an art space and a friendly Estonian. The twenty-something helped me with my musical endeavors and without me even asking began talking about his home town Tallinn.

### ← *Intuitive methods*

These complement the research methods I employ to inform the project’s theme. This in turn results in a design that adresses the site-specific problem.

↓ **Roadside**

Three small  
shopsigns advertise  
what lies behind  
the inconspicuous  
entrance to the  
former facility  
building.





PÖHJALA



**“Its so sad that in Tallinn the money goes where it sits already or is spent to attract more people from abroad. We’ve built a scene here, but we are still left to our own devices.”**

**The conversation with the man in the shop sparked inspiration on how to tackle one of the three parts of the problem I had initially outlined: the need for dynamic local engagement.**

← **Hip Hybrid**

Dusty shellacks next to leftfield local releases are sold alongside craft beer, chai and mokka. A curtained hole in the wall connects it to the fashion collective.

He recommended the newest local electro release, and after listening to it (and buying it), he explained that the artist Kenn-Eerik was also a figurehead in the local scene, active not only in producing music and DJing but also in youth work, theater, and art galleries. The record shop worker recounted his lament about the lack of a suitable youth culture hangout place in Tallinn, one where people of all ethnic backgrounds, speaking any language, can come together - without being sent away for not buying anything, as is the case in the city's numerous malls. I conducted an evaluation of Tallinn's theater

institutions, revealing a conspicuous deficiency in the availability of accessible and open venues that eschew the traditional formality often associated with such establishments. Building upon this perspective I form a question that anticipates the coupling of the fascination sparked in the musicstore, the ongoing contextual analysis of the city of Tallinn and literature research on the social impact of art:

→ **How can *theatre* be the driver of dynamic local engagement?**

# 1.6

## Contextual Analysis

### P1 Group 7

#### → The P1 Moment

gave us the opportunity to filter through our moments of curiosity in Tallinn and distill from it a conclusive hypothesis:

**Contextual variety can be stimulating if implantation is done well (layering), overwhelming if done badly (juxtaposition) and boring if nonexistent (isolation). These three cases shape the character of the urban tissue...**

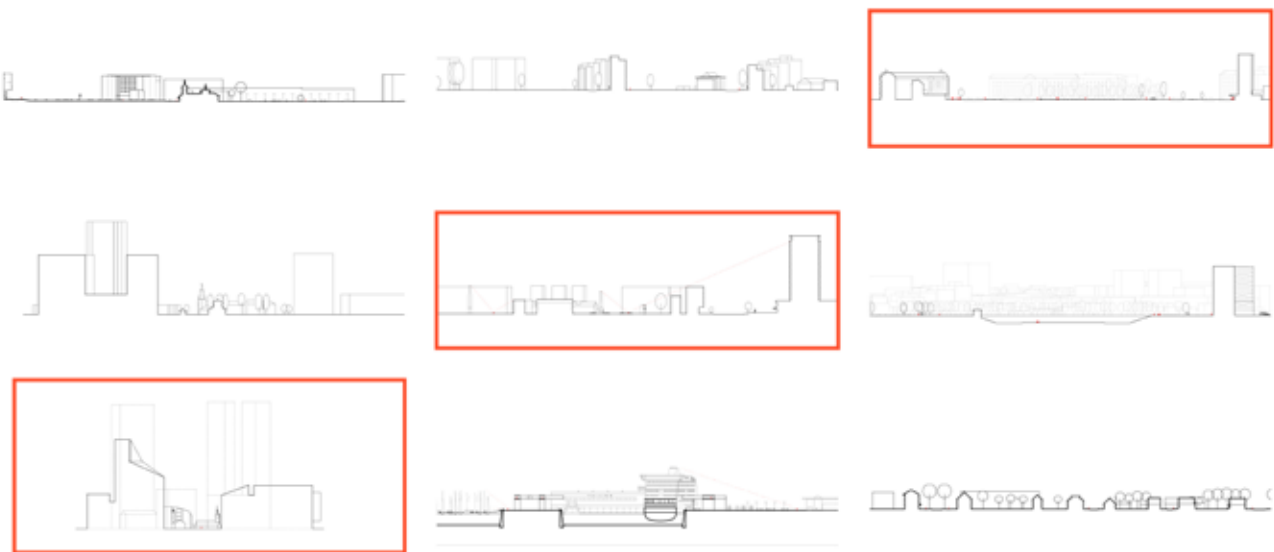


## Lenses

### Juxtaposition

### Layering

### Isolation



P1 Group 7

↑ **...or be utilised as examination tools.**

Lenses categorised by spatial patterns present in multiple moments in Tallinn.

The section chosen for the exemplification of Layering as an urban pattern was the one that cuts through the viru centre, the Rotermann District's carpenters workshop and the dilapidated ruins at the fringe of the district. Building on the data we

collected and evaluated during our work previous to the excursion, the excursion served as a control trip to confirm and corroborate assumptions. It also sharpened my senses in observation, especially on the spacial issues concerning the Rotermann District.

# 2.1

## Design Brief

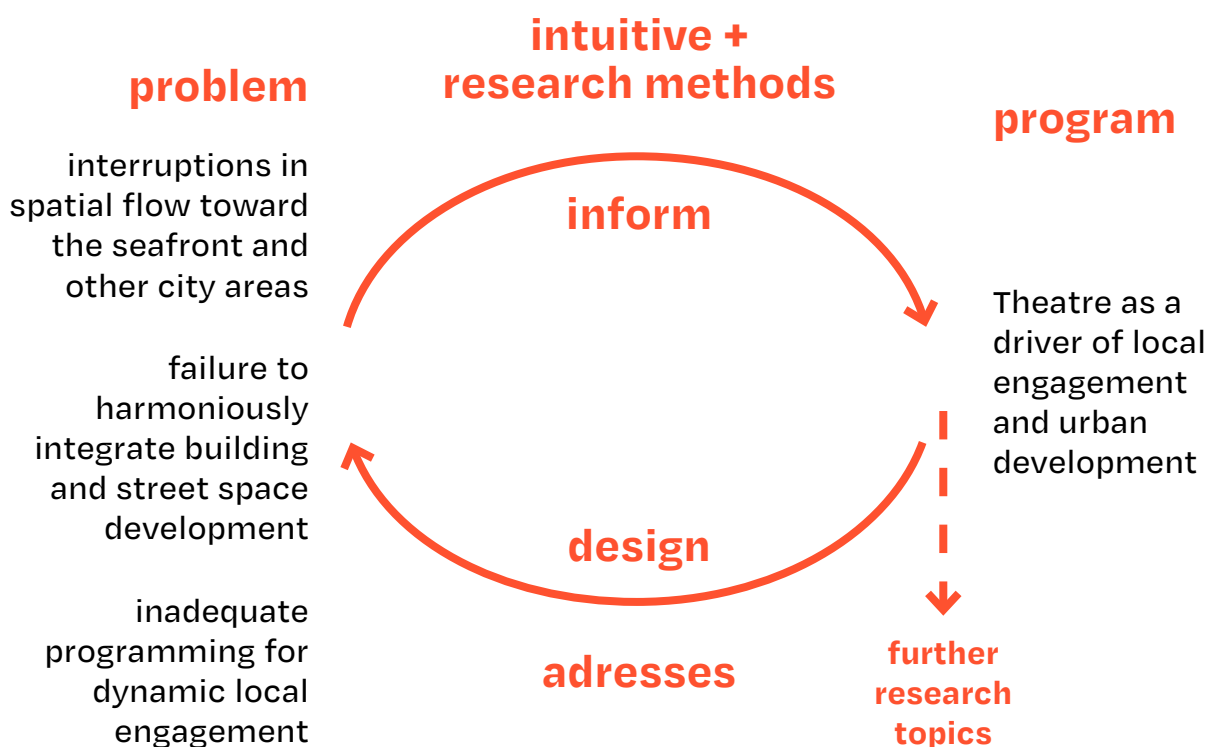
The previously gathered questions shall be addressed in form of a full-fledged architectural design embedded into an urban ensemble plan.

The formulation of a design brief brings a decisive scale to the table. This scale is preliminarily selected on its ability to meaningfully tackle the questions at hand so far.

The recursive cycle that starts off with a problem is tackled by research methods, which produces what is loosely described as fascinations, hunches,

themes of research, hypothesis etc. This is then used to create a design that addresses the original problem. Gaps in knowledge allow me to establish new fields of research. Based on this cycle of learning, the scales to utilise as tools serve as a disciplinary limitation for the posing of the design brief.

The understanding that in Tallinn the urban tissue is strikingly defined by juxtaposition, layering and isolation, that these situations exist on a spectrum and that a 'golden middle' is to be aimed for to achieve a stimulating environment, gives pointers toward implantation, gestalt language and material selection.

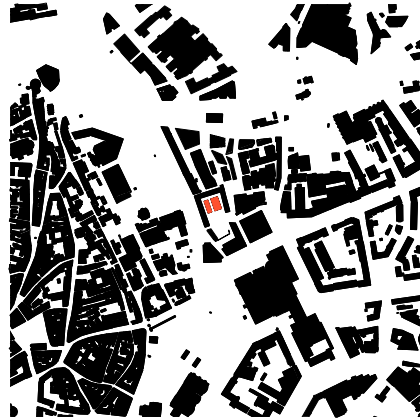


The other projects in the Rotermann Quarter define the character of the district. As part of the "Rotermann Family", the project will question the developments it has undergone:

How will the industrial buildings be transformed? What functions, program, use? Will it be clear about what is old and renovated, and what is new? Will its materials be dominated by steel and concrete structures, glass facades and hightech climate control? Will it disconnect the public space from its add-on interior? Will it be mainly aimed at financial revenue? Will its atmosphere rely on the charisma of the expensive? Will it catalyze economic growth and attract tourism?

The goal for my graduation project is to communicate my architectural position. The answers to the above questions expressed through design decisions make this position apparent, whereby the dual role architects have as activists in the public discourse and as translators of sociopolitical forces into architectural form often stand at opposing ends of the spectrum.

**1:2000**



**Integrate a theatre building as a new societal and economic catalyst into the urban fabric of the Rotermann District, addressing the lack of stimulating non-consumption spaces.**

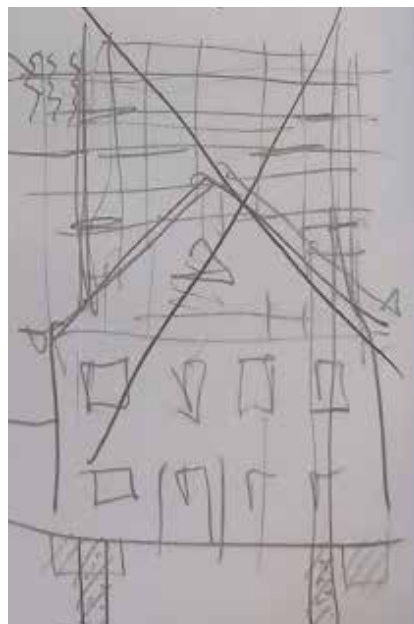
**1:500**



**Transform the dilapidated ruins at the Fringes of the Rotermann District paying special attention to the improvement of spacial flow and integration of building and street space.**



**1:100-1:1**



**Design a close cultural experience for a maximum of 400 visitors – even the furthest rows of seats are no more than 15 meters from the stage.**

## 2.3

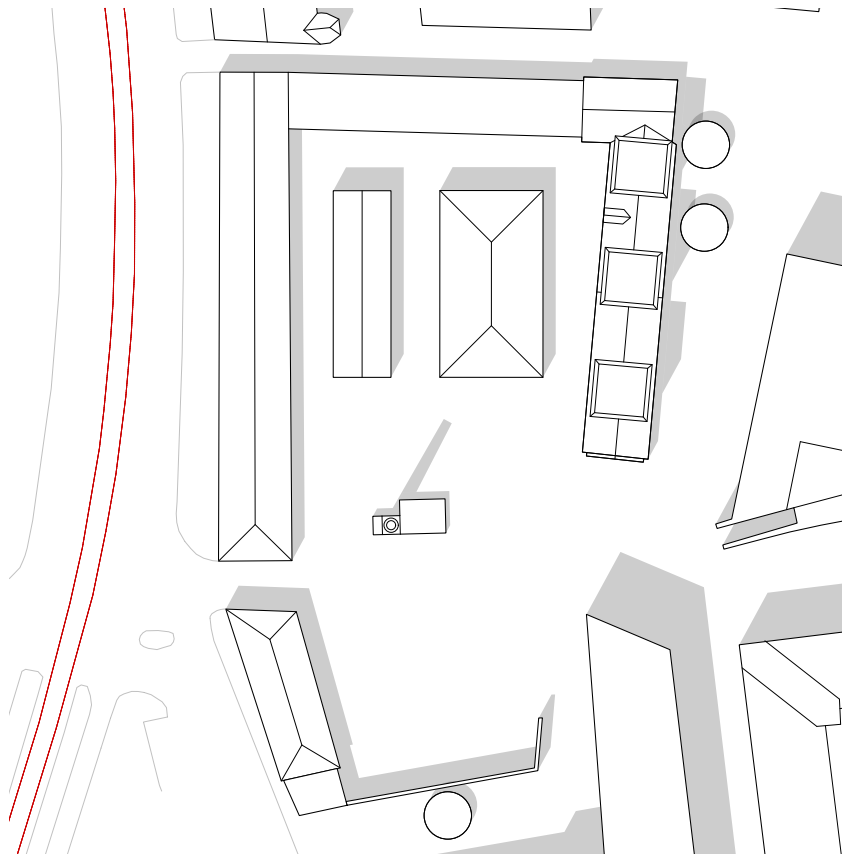
# The Basic Project

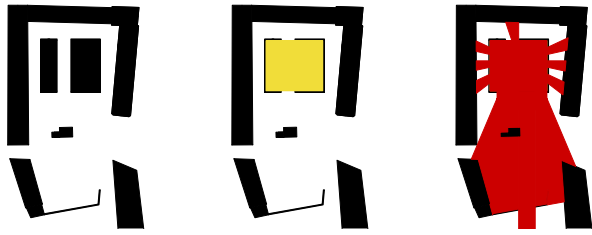
**A distilled declaration of architectural intent that conveys form and implantation, implies technique and establishes communicational patterns like types of plans, scales, colours.**

The design will focus on the publicly accessible space on the ground floor, extending towards the open space in the south which is currently a car park and turn it into a subsquare of the district. The 'carpenter's workshop' in the east has a restaurant on the ground floor facing the main Rotermann Plaza, the western building houses cafés and also a restaurant which are moderately visited on the street side but stand empty, hardly functioning towards the inner. The south of the square is limited by the remaining wall of a listed building flanked by a casino and an office building. The busy traffic node towards the city centre to the west of the area is accessed through the passage by cars mainly, while pedestrians use the technically prohibited passage through the

portal in the ruined wall. The prominent location for the construction arises from the desire to integrate the cultural building as an upbeat to the district. It promises turned heads and sparked interests, especially as its square will be threaded neatly on the sequence of plazas leading into the

bustling quarter. In the north, the backstreet starts off with an alcohol store, a run-down bar and is already used for delivery and logistics purposes. This qualifies it perfectly for the performer's entrance, back-of-house and delivery.



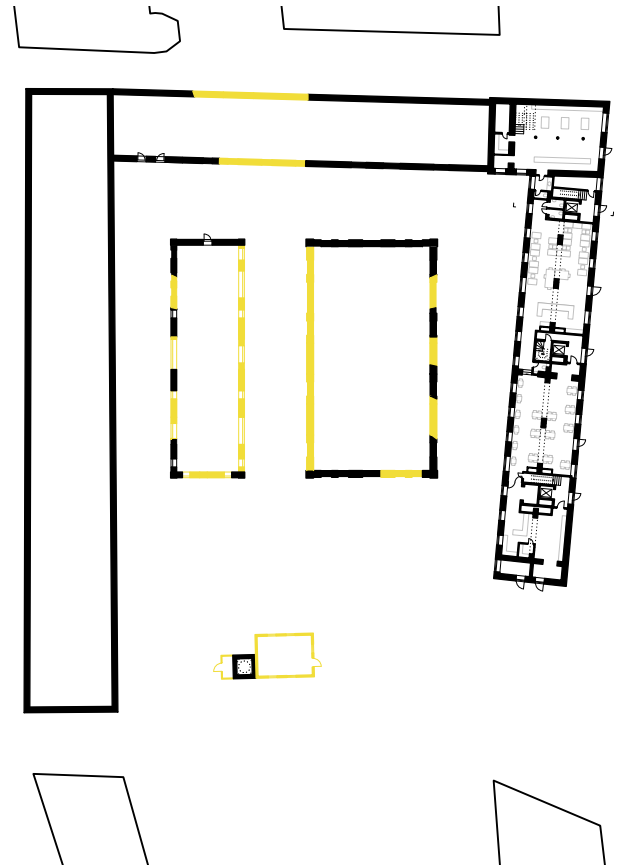


Carving out parts of the two ruins, a larger, single footprint is created. The New seems to reach outwards, in form of a single volume that grows vertically from the centre and smaller volumes that penetrate the old walls and the northern perimeter building.

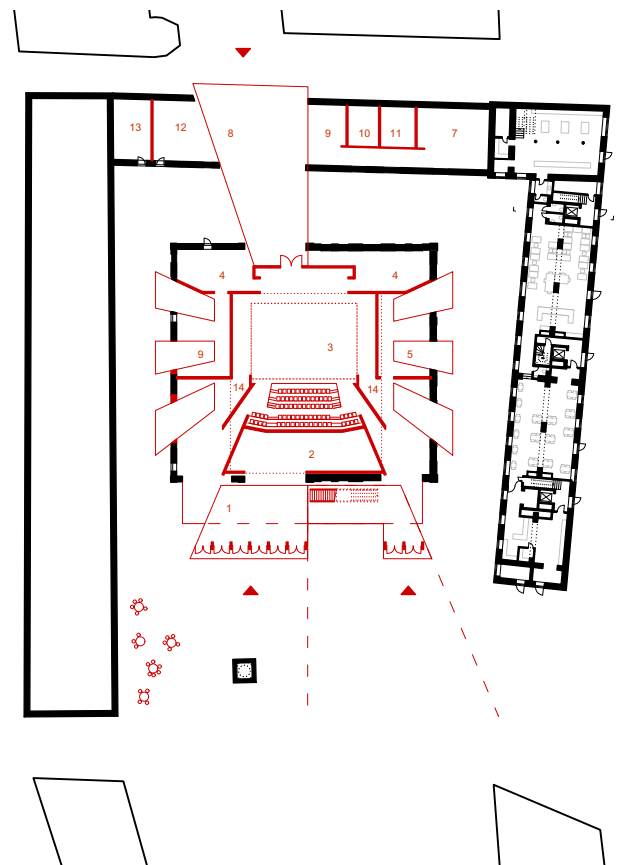
With the main functions gathered at ground level, barrier-free accessibility and the connection to the square is provided:

1. reception foyer
2. public garderobe
3. stage
4. backstage area
5. bar
6. management
7. offices
8. performers' foyer
9. boxes
10. washrooms
11. laundry
12. logistics, staff
13. waste rooms
14. technical rooms

## demolition



## addition



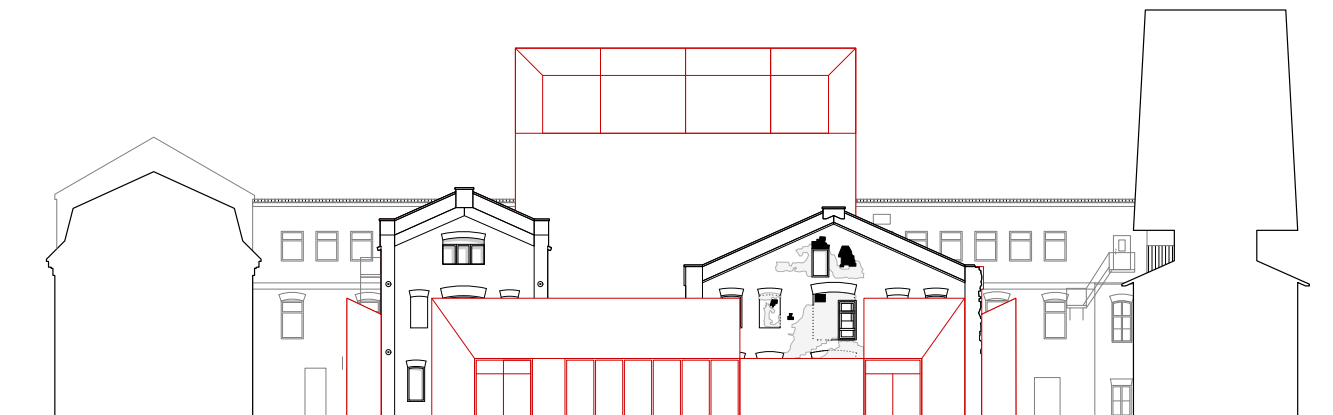
south elevation

*demolition*



south elevation

*addition*



The existing buildings are in a delapidated state, their upper floors unusable due to unstable floorslabs. The roofs do not fulfill their function and most of the openings

are either bare, barred up or even welded shut for security reasons. Only the ground floor of the western building is currently being used as a storage space and

both buildings are heavily littered. The outer walls seem to be in acceptable condition and can be used as "props" for the development of the facade's expression.

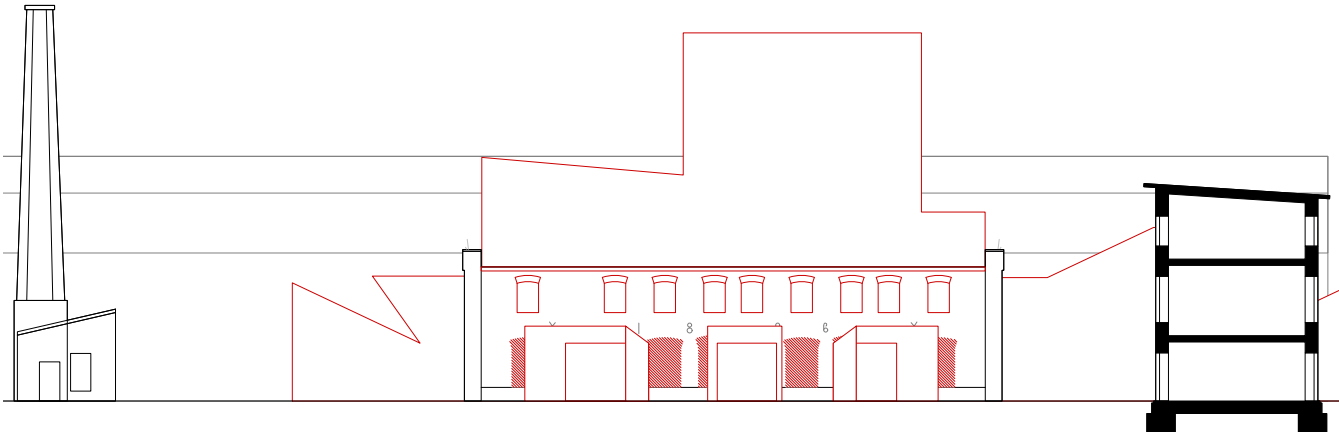
section B

*demolition*



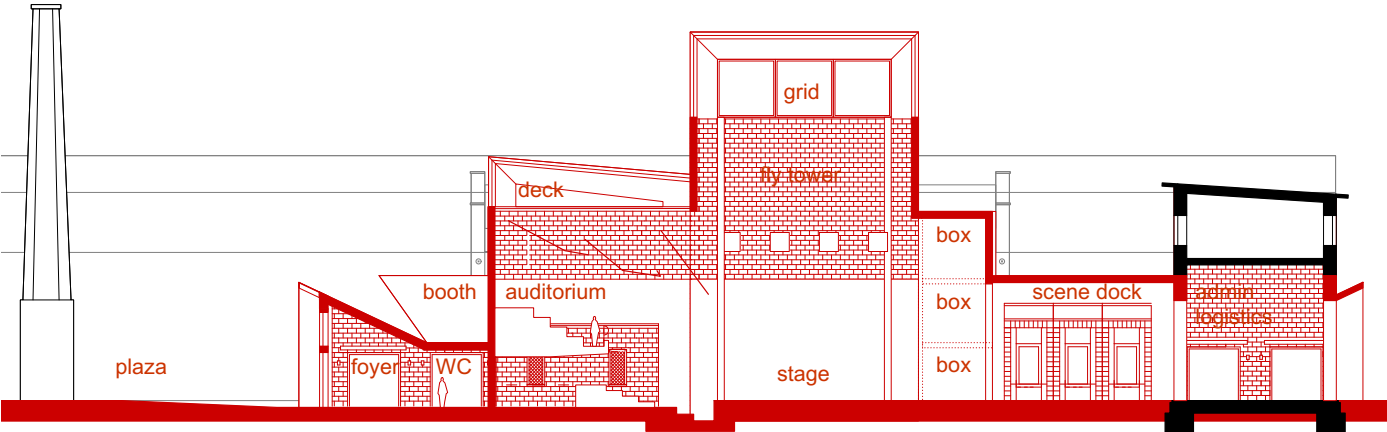
east elevation

*addition*



section B

*addition*



## 2.4

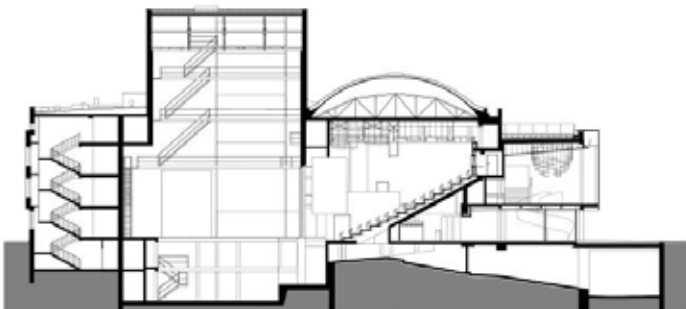
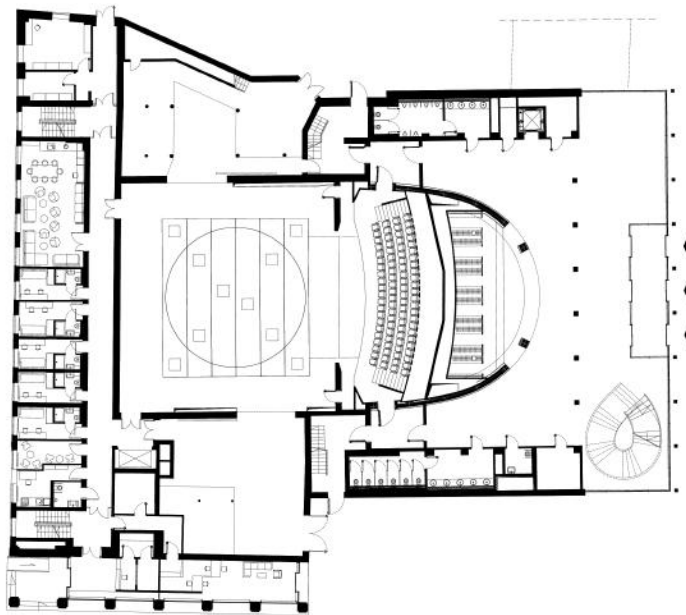
# Typology

For the formulation of the Basic Project, and as a proof of concept, the end stage theatre was preliminarily selected for exploration. Its relatively rigid zoning logic and linear sequencing fit into the proposed footprint

and the functions align with their positions relative to the public space. The height development suitable for a fly tower and grid mediates nicely between its surrounding buildings.

### Theatredesign

Theatre as an art form requires little more than a cleared space for a performer and an audience. The design of theatres aims to organise the space in order to improve the experience the audience can have, as well as the possibilities of artistic expression of the performer. The common distinction of the "cleared space" into a stage and a house is what categorises four basic forms: arena stage theatres; thrust stage (or open stage) theatres; end stage theatres (of which proscenium theatres are a subset); and flexible stage theatres, also sometimes called black box theatres. The two examples are precedents of similar performing arts centres, the Theodore-Gouvy-Theatre housing 800 with no understage, the Wybrzeże 400 with an understage.



← **Wybrzeże Theater  
by Warsztat  
Architektury**



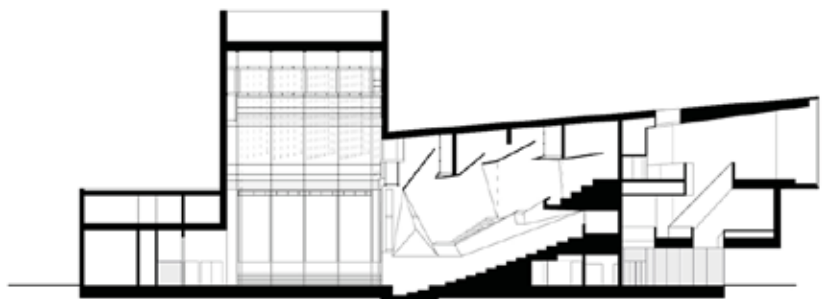
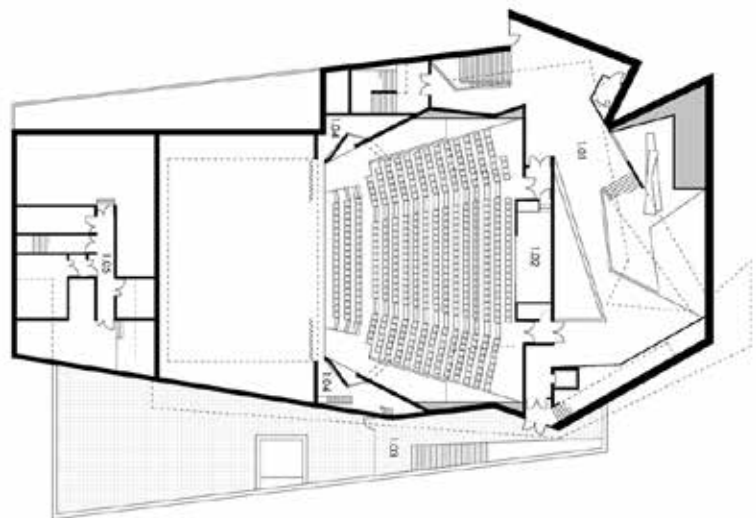
### Fostering a sense of community?

It is not possible to align types on a single scale ranging from community-building to focussing on spectacle and effectability, as the various types have individual qualities that also differ from performance to performance.

The "community engagement" of the intervention as a whole is strongly dependant on the type of theatre chosen, but it would be wrong to state that an arena theatre for example is the most engaging for people from outside. What really counts is the aesthetic quality of the space and availability of spaces, permeability and openness, that cater for curious, engaged minds.

In the best case, the space is an open space, meaning it is porous, permeable for the influx of the public. It can be used outside of predetermined events. For this to work, a restriction on flexibility is needed (think of loose chairs being stolen, modular tribunes being damaged)

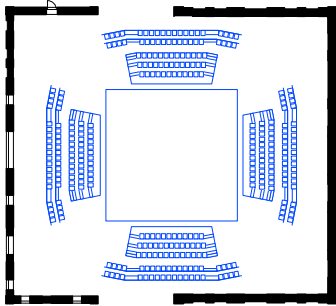
But at the same time it is a high-quality theatre space that serves the qualities deemed appropriate for the art of theatre, and that optimizes the experience of that art for the audience.



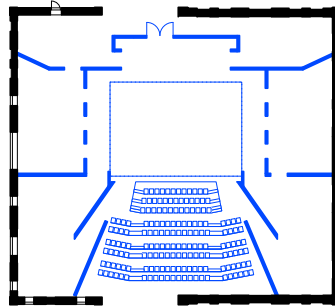
**Theodore-  
Gouvy-Theatre  
by Dominique-  
Coulon Arch.** →

Most common theatres can be fundamentally categorised by the way their designs distinguish between the performance space and the audience space. Further branches of each type arise when other factors such as circulation, organisation, construction, materiality are taken into account.

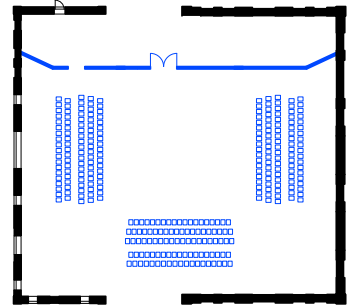
ARENA



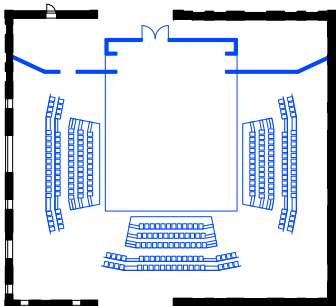
END STAGE



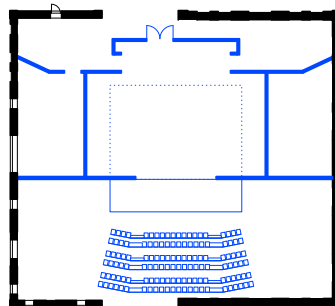
BLACK BOX



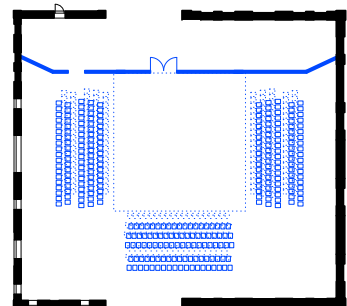
THRUST STAGE



PROSCENIUM



STUDIO

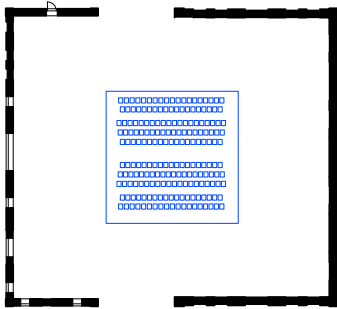


- » fosters a sense of community
- » easy flow of energy between actors and audience
- » restrictions in spectacle, special effects & scenery changes
- » complicated movement patterns ('blocking')

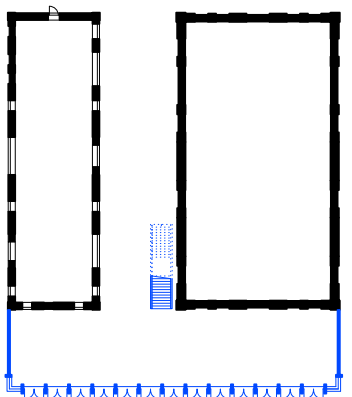
- » attention focussing
- » simplified blocking, display of scenery and special effects
- » less conducive to building a sense of community
- » similarity to moving pictures
- » actors have to work hard to convey energy

- » no fixed relationship between stage and house
- » interior not an integral part of the space
- » can be modified into any configuration, such as the total theatre arrangement

## TOTAL THEATRE



## ENVIRONMENTAL



- » strong emphasis on the qualities of the existing space
- » audience can follow the actors around, multifocal performances possible (promenade theatre)

## Thought on the end-stage type

The form's greatest advantage continues to be that it allows for the maximum amount of spectacle in performance. The trade-off is that actors must work harder to project their energy from the stage into the house than they do in other theatre forms, because proscenium theatres, especially those without apron stages, tend to make the audience observers of the drama rather than people who experience the drama taking place in their midst.

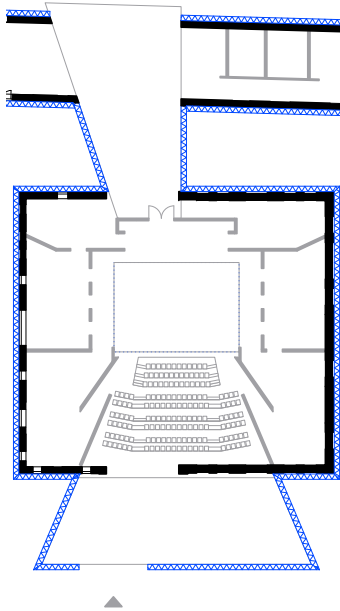
'In cultures where observation is considered an appropriate aesthetic quality for theatre, proscenium theatres proliferate; in those where audiences expect to share more of the experience of the drama, they are less popular.'

Hildy, Franklin J.. "theatre design".  
Encyclopedia Britannica, 30 Jul. 2022

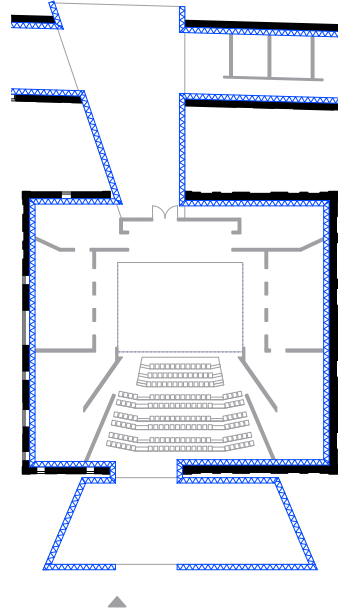


**For open spaces to be used, and indeed for theatre productions to happen all year round, a degree of climate control is needed. Locations such as Tallinn demand seasonal adaptations: providing warmth in winter and cooling in summer.**

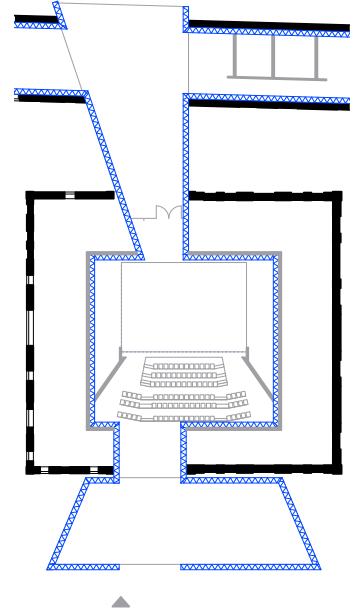
OUTSIDE ENVELOPE



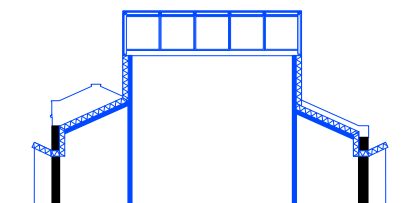
INSIDE ENVELOPE



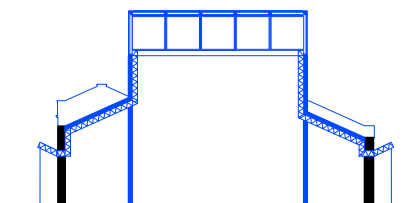
OFFSET ENVELOPE



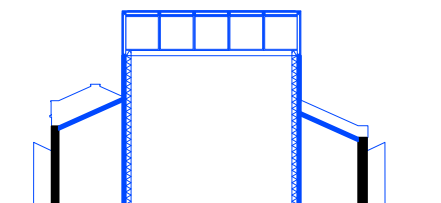
TOWER OUTSIDE ENVELOPE



TOWER HYBRID ENVELOPE



TOWER INSIDE ENVELOPE

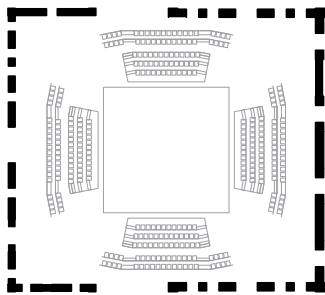


Although 'cold', simply covered solutions are viable, a thermal envelope is necessary to make the transformation into a permanently available, competitive, highly valued and

well-maintained cultural venue possible. Low-tech climate responsive architecture, which includes strategically placed wind barriers, manually operatable shading devices, natural ventilation and the use

of materials that can absorb or reflect heat, compliment high-tech solutions that provide regulatory compliance and energy efficiency. Inside, outside and hybrid envelope solutions depend on the structural and technical type.

NO THERMAL  
ENVELOPE



← **If the enhancement of the existing space is a structural and one only, a found environment theatre (= a useable ruin) is produced.**

This consideration is relevant not only from a resource scarcity point of view, but also because it omits challenges arising from an open and permeable, yet energy-efficient thermal envelope.

↓ **PC Caritas by De Vylder Vink Tailleu**

That adaptive reuse does not necessarily mean working with a thermal envelope is demonstrated by the Belgian office with the revitalisation of a ruined healthcare facility. The project worked closely with its users, ensuring acceptance and meeting the desires of everyone involved.

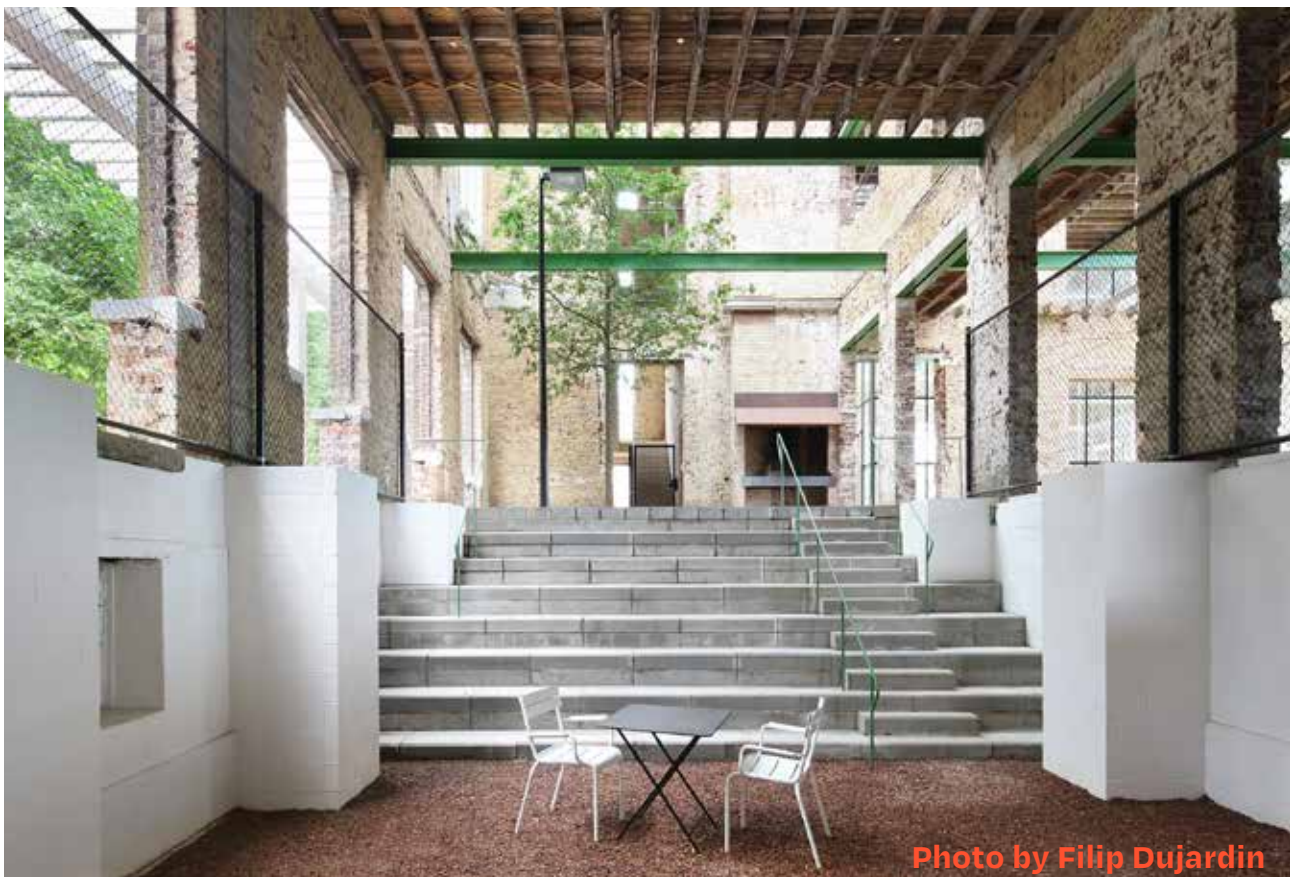


Photo by Filip Dujardin

# 3.1

## Rationalisation

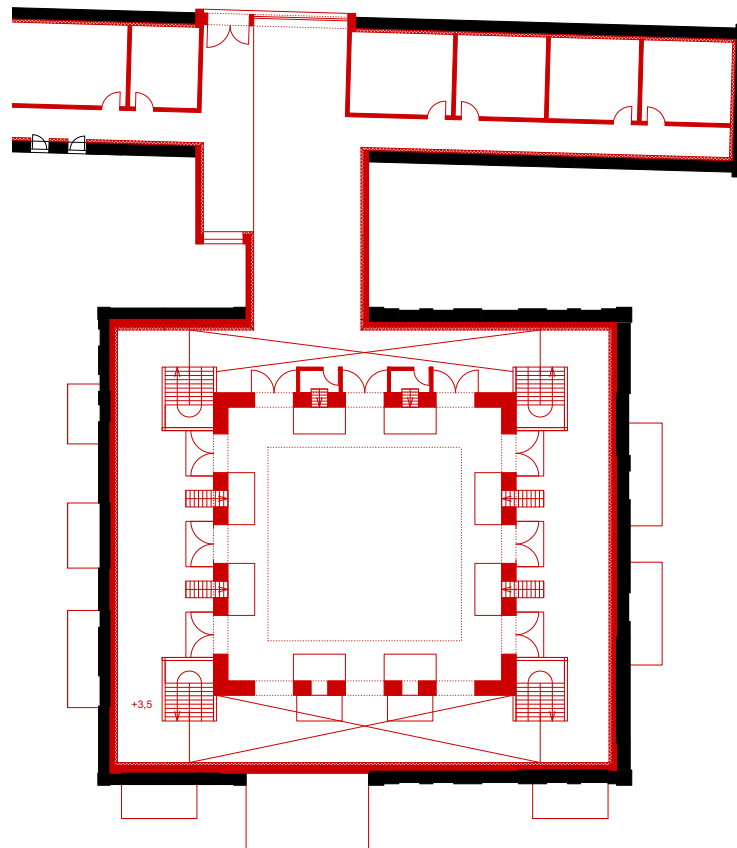
### The Square

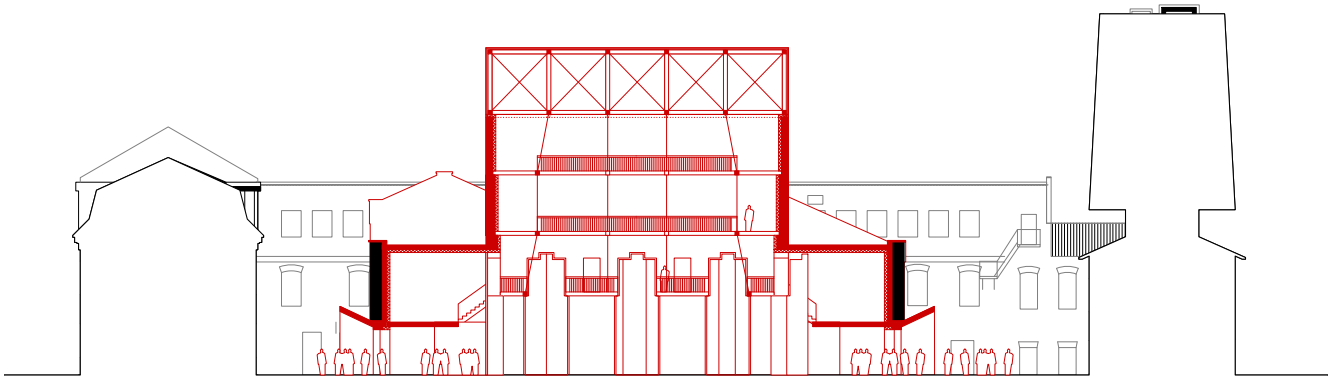
To clarify the projects type and formal intent, a radically symmetrical, central, square version of the blackbox stage is placed in the footprint. The rigidity interferes with its function and requires modification as the next step.

Its all about the central *hot space*. The perimeterwall is thickened up to house secondary spaces and vertical circulation. These lead to the east and west galleries and their balconies. The step-outs in the north and south are accessed from the ground floor, allowing for unexpected appearances and quick fixes.

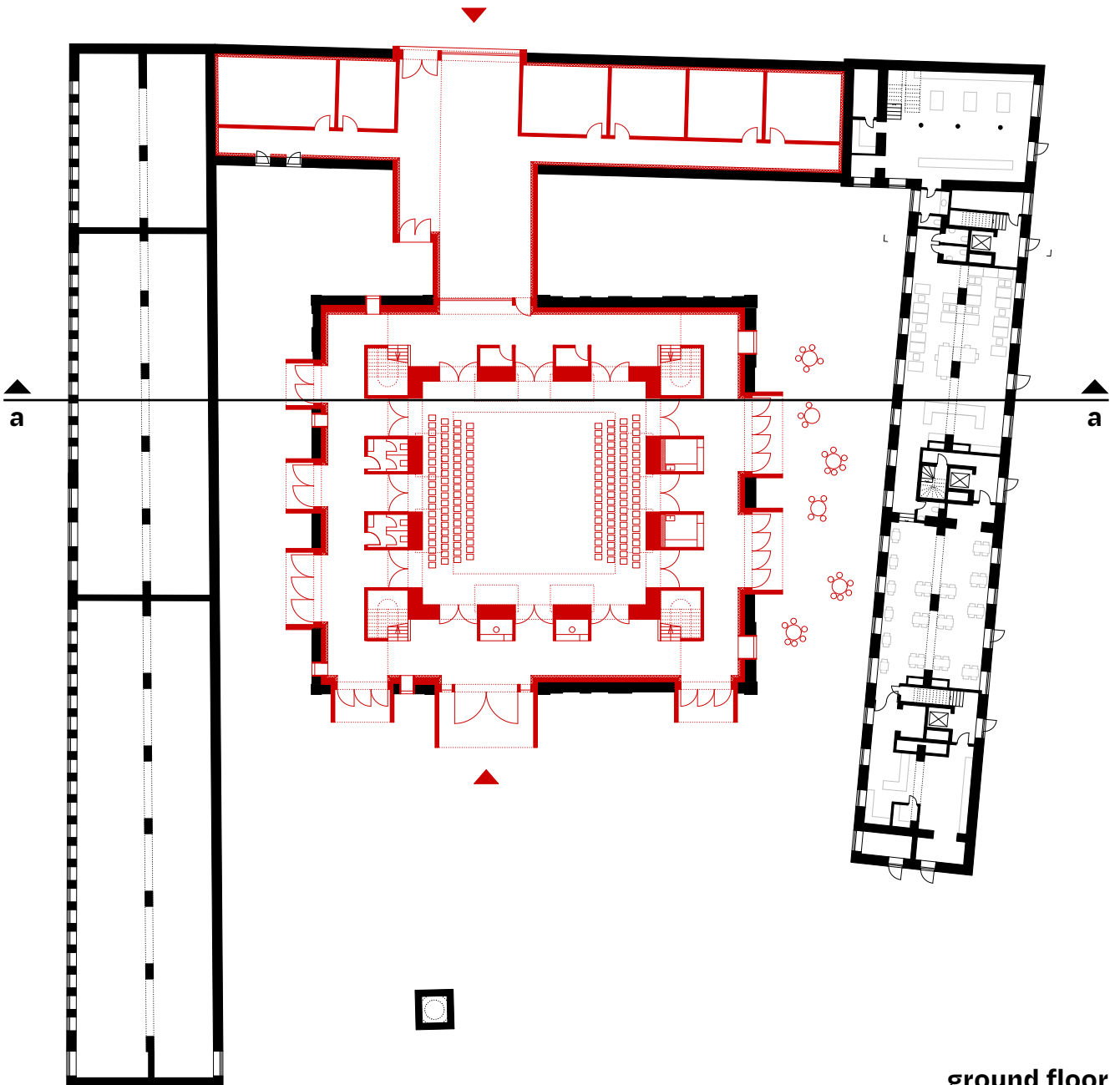
The northern building is refit with floorslabs, walls, installations and insulations in order to accommodate backstage and management facilities, complete with a large scene dock fit with a crane.

The connection between the two buildings can be toggled by rolling curtains.





aa



ground floor

# 3.1

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## 3.2

# Reflection

**How do we create inclusive and vibrant spaces that engage both locals and visitors, fostering creativity while instilling a sense of shared responsibility?**

A vision that extends beyond mere financial viability, seeking to establish spaces that serve as social hubs and withstand societal challenges, ensuring sustainability (through value, maintenance) even in economically difficult times? Spaces that are designed not just for consumption and commerce but as thriving ecosystems where community engagement, creativity, and social well-being coalesce to form resilient and enriching environments?

The relevance of my work results from the applicability of the solutions I propose for

the questions at hand: A transformation of the two dilapidated ruins at the fringes of the Rotermann District into a multifunctional performance space for a close cultural experience between locals and visitors, paying special attention to the improvement of spacial flow towards the southwestern entrance to the inner city and integration of building and street space.

The inspection of different scales that together make up the communication of built form and expected use/function and the production of drawings that cover the multitude of scales necessary to communicate the entire project, from urban integration to configuration of the parts (detailing). By the familiar means of drawing, writing

and making, the project will be progressed and result in a full-fledged architectural design.

**Through the project I will be able to exhibit what my architectural position to pressing current problems of a European city is and what being an architect means to me: Acting the dual role as an activist in the public discourse of the built and as translators of socio-political forces into architectural form.**